



DEPARTMENT OF
NORTHERN AFFAIRS AND NATIONAL RESOURCES
EDITORIAL AND INFORMATION DIVISION

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THE MACE OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

Free copper from the shores of the Arctic Ocean
whalebone and a narwhal tusk from Foxe Peninsula muskox
horns from Ellesmere Island pure gold from the mines of the
Mackenzie District an Eskimo harpoon porcupine
quillwork from Yellowknife oak from the sailing vessel of an
early explorer.

These are the materials worked into the Mace of the
Council of the Northwest Territories by the creative skills of the
Eskimos of the Eastern Arctic.

The Right Honourable Vincent Massey, Governor-General
of Canada, presented the mace to the Council during its sessions held
in Ottawa in January, 1956. A year before, the Governor-General,
who has had a long interest in the North, its people and their art,
decided to present to the legislators of the Northwest Territories
this symbol of authority. The Mace was to be similar to the tradi-
tional emblems carried in the Parliaments of Canada and the United
Kingdom, but embodying elements representing the history and life
of the north. The work was entrusted to the most famous artists of
the North, the Eskimos whose carvings in stone held a distinguished
place in the galleries of the western world.

Chosen for the task were Eskimos of Cape Dorset, a small
community on southeastern Baffin Island. Pitsulak became foreman
and Oshawetuk was appointed chief carver. With Pitsulak and
Oshawetuk worked six other Eskimos who took on such tasks as
hammering copper, filing and polishing. Technical direction was

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given by James A. Houston, well-known artist of the north on the staff of the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources. Together the group completed the project in just twenty-one days.

Work began on July 15 after Mr. Houston had provided the craftsmen with a rough sketch of the proposed Mace and an explanation of the Mace's meaning. The Eskimos at first took a light-hearted approach to their work, terming the Mace "pingwartok" or "the plaything". Later they came to understand the import of the unusual object they were being asked to make, and the work was carried on with fervour from seven in the morning until eleven o'clock at night. Now the Mace was called respectfully, "Anoutoaloak" or "the great club", an appropriate name for an article of parliamentary ceremonial which in its earliest form had been used as a weapon to protect the persons of French and English kings.

The most troublesome detail of the Mace's construction was the Crown. Native copper is found in pure, free form in the central Arctic. An 80-pound block was brought to Cape Dorset and pounded into sheets with rocks and a small sledge-hammer. The ~~sheets were cut and hammered into shape on rocks which were~~ adapted as dies. Braided copper wire, stripped of its insulation, was clipped and soldered to the strips of copper forming the arches of the Crown. When the Crown was completed, one of its projections broke off, but Fitsulak and his workmen had used all the copper. The crisis was resolved by the donation of a prized possession of one of the Eskimo women - a large copper kettle left in 1921 by the reindeer herders from Lapland. The copper from the kettle was used to repair the Crown, while its donor, Udlukriak, later received a new kettle, a gift from the Governor-General.

The Orb, which surmounts the Crown, is made from whalebone, left on the shores of Baffin Island by Scottish whaling crews a hundred years ago. The ball of the Orb, which appears perfectly spherical, was carved from the whalebone without the assistance of calipers or any drafting aid.

Below the Crown and Orb of the 35-pound Mace, the imaginative mind of the Eskimo craftsman worked creatively, leaving the original concepts of the rough design made by Mr. Houston. A circle of Bowhead whales, symbols of royalty and greatness, are carved in relief upon whalebone. Curving out from below this circle, are four musk-ox horns from Ellesmere Island. These horns did not match when found and long hours of scraping were required to bring the four to the same size. The position of the horns was selected with discretion by the Eskimos, since proximity to the Crown might suggest a diabolical implication. ~~Discs of pure gold from the three great gold-producing mines of the Territories are interspersed between the horns.~~

Midway on the head is a circular carving of whalebone in which the people and animals of the Arctic are depicted. Here are carved expressively the musk-ox, the polar bear, the wolf, the white whale, the caribou, the walrus, the Eskimo hunter, and the Eskimo mother and child.

Beneath this carving a band of porcupine quillwork, made by an Indian woman of the Yellowknife district adds colour and variety. The base of the head is a bowl-shaped section of whalebone bearing carved representations of white Arctic fox pelts, which are the staple of the Eskimo economy.

The tusk of a narwhal forms the shaft of the Mace. The narwhal's tusk is in reality an overgrown ~~tooth~~, nearly six feet long. At first glance it looks like a twisted horn and gave substance to the

legend of the unicorn when first observed by early Arctic navigators. The unicorn has figured extensively in Anglo-Saxon heraldry but it was from the narwhal that the tales of unicorns were originally derived. In a sense, therefore, the Mace of the Northwest Territories bears a heraldic symbol older than the arms of Canada.

The foot of the Mace is topped by a carved piece of oak from the wreck of H.M.S. "Fury", Sir William Parry's ship that grounded on Somerset Island in 1825. This relic was found by Supt. Henry Larsen, during his successful voyage through the North-West Passage in the R.C.M.P. vessel St. Roch in 1940-1942. The carving on the oak portrays the entry of explorers and Europeans to the Arctic.

Beneath the oak are another band of Indian quillwork and the final section of whalebone into which are carved the seals. Seals are the most important sea-mammals to the Eskimos, providing them with meat, skins for clothing and boots, and oil for heating and cooking.

The entire Mace stands 5 1/2 feet high and its components are joined together by a harpoon, which passes through the centre.

With the presentation of the Mace by the Governor-General, the Council of the Northwest Territories now has an unique object of art that symbolizes not only the authority of the Crown but also the artistry, enterprise, and industry of the peoples who occupy the northern third of Canada.

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